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RSS News Readers and Other Alternatives to Web Browsing

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Given the recent launch of *TechnoLawyer Blog*, and the rising popularity of blogs in general, we felt compelled to dig into the [TechnoLawyer Archive](#) and republish the following article on RSS/XML newsreaders by J.D. Lasica, which we originally published last year in our [TechnoFeature](#) newsletter. We hope you find it as helpful and informative as we do.

Synopsis

RSS newsreader software and other online information management tools continue to improve, enabling lawyers to better assimilate online information. RSS in particular may become to the Web what TiVo has become to TV. In this article, journalist and blogger J.D. Lasica reviews the latest RSS tools.

RSS News Readers and Other Alternatives to Web Browsing

By J.D. Lasica

(Originally Published in *Online Journalism Review*: J.D. Lasica, [Surf's Down as More Netizens Turn to RSS for Browsing](#), *Online Journalism Review*, May 5, 2004.)

Introduction

These days it's not easy being an infowarrior. As the number of blogs and niche news sites continue to soar, how do you keep on top of everything?

While most Netizens still surf to Web sites to catch the latest postings, more users have found that to be a laborious, time-consuming way to browse. Instead they are installing "newsreader" software that constantly plucks feeds from Weblogs and news outlets and pulls them together onto a single screen.

That, in a nutshell, is RSS (short for Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication). It's a Web tool that lets you create a personalized news experience by building an ad hoc online network of friends, experts and news sources. Minutes after they post a new story or blog entry, it arrives on your

screen as a headline and short summary or in its entirety. Call it "news that comes to you."

After a couple of hours of subscribing to favorite feeds, your news grazing habits will be changed forever. Just as TiVo lets you watch TV more efficiently, RSS readers do the same by letting you scan your favorite blogs and news sites faster or letting you cast your net over a wider range of material.

RSS readers, first introduced in 1999, are still fairly new and need some time to mature. What would the perfect RSS newsreader of the future look like? I'd like to see my newsreader offer far more flexibility in letting me prioritize and rank feeds from different sources, perhaps giving more weight to The New York Times than blogger Glenn Reynolds — or vice versa. I'd like RSS feeds assigned to different reporters and columnists, so I could read their writings almost instantly. I want relevant graphics and images in my RSS feeds. I'd like a better interface between my RSS reader and my Weblog software so I can comment on the news faster and easier.

Some or all of that may be coming in future generations of the tools. For now, current RSS readers still help me manage my time better. To help you get productive, I've listed the RSS feeds of some popular blogs and sites at the end of this article. (Some RSS programs come loaded with dozens of pre-installed channels.)

Speed reading the Net is just the first step. How do you archive, access and creatively use the news you come across? I've checked out a handful of other productivity tools you'll likely find useful.

FeedDemon

Site: <http://www.feeddemon.com>

Use: RSS News Reader for the PC

Cost: \$29.95

One-man software company [Nick Bradbury](#), best known for the Web editing tools HomeSite and TopStyle, launched FeedDemon late last year and it has already become a favorite.

Like most newsreaders, FeedDemon requires you to subscribe to individual news feeds. If you do this once, you can import your subscriptions list to other newsreaders later.

FeedDemon uses a three-pane, browser-like interface. At the left is the list of channels you subscribe to. At the right are the headlines and summaries for each channel you click on. By clicking on a headline, a third pane displays the Web page where the headline originated.

Newbies sometimes get overwhelmed by subscribing to dozens of channels, each of which can offer a dozen or more headline offerings per day. As you become an RSS veteran,

you'll learn not to sweat it. Instead of surfing to and scrolling through a dozen or more blogs or news sites, you'll simply scan the headlines that interest you, ignore the rest — and take control of your media environment. You can set the newsreader to scan for updates at specified times throughout the day, letting you know when there are new items waiting for your attention, cutting down on time spent on surfing.

Three FeedDemon features set it apart from some other newsreaders. You can set up a special "watch" channel that searches news items for specific keywords. You can copy items to a news bin for later reference. And you can choose to read your news in a format set up to resemble a newspaper page.

NetNewsWire

Site: <http://www.ranchero.com/netnewswire>

Use: RSS News Reader for the Mac

Cost: NetNewsWire Lite is free; \$39.95 for Full Version

NetNewsWire from developer [Brent Simmons](#) usually winds up atop any list of Mac users' favorite newsreaders. The freeware Lite version is a good introduction to the RSS phenomenon. The setup is similar to other news readers: Subscribe to channels, which show up at the left of a browser pane; select a channel to see the latest news feeds at the right.

Both free and advanced versions of the program offer a sleek, simple interface, but the full version has several [additional features](#), such as Weblog posting and editing. Any day now an upgrade will add new features, including tabbed browsing.

If you're a Mac-head, NetNewsWire is all you need to get you up and running with RSS.

Other RSS News Services

It's best to sample several newsreaders to see which one fits your style. Some of these are free. For those that aren't, always use the free trial before forking over your credit card. Here are several newsreaders that deserve a look:

[Bloglines](#), a free Web-based application that lets you track favorite blogs and news feeds from any computer.

[AmphetaDesk](#), a free, open-source, cross-platform newsreader.

[SharpReader](#), an RSS reader for the PC.

[Radio UserLand](#), a desktop news-reading application for the PC and Mac.

[Awasu](#), a free PC newsreader that runs in the background.

[NewsWatcher](#), an RSS reader for the PC.

[Rocket RSS Reader](#), a free but bare-bones newsreader

[Syndic8](#), a clearinghouse to discover RSS feeds.

[NewzCrawler](#), a newsreader for the PC.

[Shrook](#), a new newsreader for the Mac.

[eNEWS crawler](#), a desktop application that crawls RSS channels.

[NewsGator](#), if you prefer to read your news within Microsoft Outlook on a PC.

[PubSub](#), an alert service that uses RSS feeds to search for keywords you specify.

[MyFeedster](#), a Web-based news aggregator that lets you save posts, searches and more.

[NewsMonster](#), a news, Weblog and RSS aggregator that runs directly in your Web browser (works best in Mozilla).

[NewsIsFree](#), an application that lets you create customized news page with RSS feeds.

[PulpFiction](#), a new newsreader for the Mac.

[Kinja](#), not a newsreader but a blog portal that groups blogs into different channels, such as Politics, Music, Books or Movies; or, track your favorite writers.

More RSS newsreaders can be found at the [Open Directory Project](#).

Setting Up an RSS/XML Feed

If you have a Weblog, you'll likely already have an RSS or XML feed. Blog software providers such as [Blogger](#), [MovableType](#), [Radio Userland](#), and [TypePad](#) offer them as standard fare. With an RSS feed, you don't need to lift a finger to have your feed broadcast to others. Most blog software vendors provide this service automatically.

Trackle and QuickBrowse

Sites: <http://www.trackle.com> and <http://www.quickbrowse.com>

Use: An alternative to RSS

Cost: \$19.95 per year or \$1.95 per month for Trackle;
\$46.60 per year for Quickbrowse

Marc Fest, a journalist turned software entrepreneur in Miami, has created two applications that help info-junkies hunt down the news they want.

While a handful of other services retrieve content from different sources and reformat it on a personal news page that you have to visit, Quickbrowse preserves the original look of various Web pages and sends them to your inbox as one long scrolling HTML e-mail. For instance, you can subscribe to the front page of The New York Times' Technology section, the Health section of The Christian Science Monitor, the sports wire of the Los Angeles Times, and a dozen of your favorite blogs.

I alternate between Quickbrowse and Trackle, a new application that strips out all graphics and typography and serves up a single text e-mail of up to 25 news sites and blogs. Trackle offers the additional advantage that it will retrieve only the text on a page that has changed since its last visit. Unlike news readers, which display only the beginning of a posting, Trackle gives you postings in their entirety. You can set Trackle to fetch Web pages once a day or at specified times throughout the day. Quickbrowse will relaunch around June 1 with lower pricing: \$2.95 per month or \$29.95 per year and it will come with a free Trackle account.

ActiveWords

Site: <http://www.activewords.com>

Use: Productivity tool

Cost: \$19.95 or \$49.95 (individuals; [see version comparison](#))

My favorite productivity program is ActiveWords, a handy little application for the PC that makes the machinery behind Microsoft Windows all but disappear. ActiveWords lets you devise a shortcut to navigate to a Web site or Weblog by tapping a couple of keys (no need to remember unwieldy URLs). It also helps you retrieve any file or launch any obscure program on your computer, or summon up a blank e-mail with the recipient's address filled in. If you've stored hundreds of documents or Web pages on your hard drive and have a hard time remembering where you filed them in the maze known as the Windows folder hierarchy, ActiveWords can open them up with just a few keystrokes — and without a single mouse click. Just assign and remember a keyboard shortcut, such as "staci." The coolest feature may be the "substitute text" feature, which lets you tap a couple of keys to call up a long string of text. Check it out, carpal tunnel candidates.

HotBot Desktop

Site: <http://www.hotbot.com/tools/desktop>

Use: Locate files on your PC

Cost: Free

Remember the HotBot search engine? Its owner, Lycos, has discovered that one new frontier of search is not the Web, but the entrails of your PC. The HotBot Desktop utility indexes all the files on your computer, making every word in documents and e-mails fully searchable. A new feature is an RSS reader in the left pane of your Internet Explorer browser; Hotbot will index RSS feeds, so you can search your desktop for a blog posting you saw months ago. Hotbot Desktop is remarkably effective and, best of all, it's free. (Tip: After indexing your files, you have to close and restart your browser.)

Other programs that will search your computer include [X1](#) (\$99), [SearchGun](#) (\$19), [Super Text Search](#) (\$29), [Media Search](#) (\$25), [Files Search Assistant](#) (\$60), [Filehand](#) (\$39), and [Lookout](#), a Microsoft Outlook plug-in that provides lightning-fast search capabilities to your mailbox. Be advised that only single words — not phrases — can be retrieved in most of these programs.

Other programs that let you store files you come across in your power searches include [Onfolio](#), [Net Snippets](#), and [Furl](#).

RSS Feeds

Below I've placed some RSS feeds you may find useful. Look for "RSS" or "XML" for the feed of a blog or news site, or head to a service like Syndic8. Don't click on the links; instead, simply copy and paste the URL into the "subscribe" field of your newsreader.

Jim Romenesko:

<http://xml.newsfree.com/feeds/18/2018.xml>

CJR's Campaign Desk:

<http://www.campaigndesk.com/rss.asp>

The New York Times on the Campaign Trail:

<http://partners.userland.com/nytRss/campaigns.xml>

BBC News:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/syndication/feeds/news/ukfs_news/front_page/rss091.xml

Christian Science Monitor World News:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/rss/world.rss>

Salon:

http://www.salon.com/feed/RDF/salon_use.rdf

Slate:

<http://slate.msn.com/rss>

Dan Gillmor's eJournal:

<http://weblog.siliconvalley.com/column/dangillmor/index.xml>

PBS NewsHour:

http://interglacial.com/rss/pbs_newshour.rss

Digital Media Jobs:

<http://feeds.feedburner.com/dmjobs>

Instapundit:

<http://instapundit.com/index.xml>

Political Wire:

<http://politicalwire.com/headlines.xml>

Yahoo Politics News (from AP, Reuters, Washington Post, USA Today and NPR):

<http://rss.news.yahoo.com/rss/politics>

Talking Points Memo:

<http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/index.xml>

160 Amazon feeds:

<http://channels.lockergnome.com/rss/resources/amazon.phtml>

From Rolling Stone, a Feed for Your Favorite Artist:

<http://www.rollingstone.com/rssxml/search.asp>

NYU's PressThink:

<http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/index.rdf>

New Media Musings (my blog):

<http://jd.typepad.com/blog/index.rdf>

Student News:

<http://www.studentnewspaper.org/rss/rss.xml>

BoingBoing:

<http://boingboing.net/rss.xml>

The Smoking Gun:

http://www.interglacial.com/rss/the_smoking_gun.rss

Snopes.com Urban Legends:

<http://www.snopes.com/info/whatsnew.rss>

Slashdot:

<http://slashdot.org/index.rss>

Daily Princetonian:

<http://www.dailyprincetonian.com/rss.xml>

TechnoLawyer

<http://feeds.feedburner.com/technolawyer>

About the Author

J.D. Lasica blogs at Newmediamusings.com, and is the author of the new book [Darknet: Hollywood's War Against the Digital Generation](#) (Wiley & Sons), about the clash between Hollywood and the public over digital technology.

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